PATIENTLY TO SUFFER THE WORLD:
ESCHATOLOGY AND APOCALYPSE IN EARLY MODERN RELIGIOUS TOLERATION.

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ABSTRACT

Matthew H. Young: Patiently to Suffer the World:
Eschatology and Apocalypse in Early Modern Religious Toleration
(Under the direction of Jeff Spinner-Halev)

Liberal doctrines of religious toleration are rooted in early modern developments of liberty of conscience relying on epistemological skepticism and the privatization of belief. However, these underpinnings have recently come under scrutiny, with many theorists suggesting that such justifications cannot withstand major issues. An extensive liberal doctrine of toleration may find itself incapable of prohibiting deeply concerning practices that flow from sincere religious belief, while limited conceptions of toleration exclude precisely those groups that necessitate toleration. These problems have led many theorists to seek new grounds for religious toleration. However, the early modern project is not irreparably flawed. A close study of early modern theological and political texts from the Baptist tradition that inspired both Roger Williams and John Locke reveals the particular importance of eschatology to creating a comprehensive and extensive doctrine of religious toleration. The Baptist commitment to "eschatological millenarianism," or a political theology characterized by the virtues of patience, hope, and comity offers compelling solutions to contemporary problems in religious toleration.

To my family.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Modern religious toleration, now considered central to the liberal political tradition, is largely thought to have emerged in the early modern period as an antidote to violence and political instability stemming from religious difference. On the most common account, proto-liberal and secular accounts of religious toleration such as that offered by John Locke emerged in the 17th century, on which later developments in liberal theory are founded.[1] However, such accounts may not do justice to the original intent of historical theorists. The earliest works championing religious toleration often take on a decidedly non-secular form, one that is inseparable from the theological commitments of their writers. Understanding – and correctly tracing – the early modern roots of toleration requires taking seriously the context and intentions of early modern theorists, and displaying a hesitance to force their theories into modern liberal categories.

One such thread common to the early modern tradition is the shared commitment to evangelism. "Evangelical toleration," as elucidated by Teresa Bejan, suggests "that toleration is a necessary precondition for individuals to preach and propagate the Gospel and so convert others to it."[2] While evangelical concerns played a significant role in many early modern accounts of

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[1] Among such accounts: Rawls, John. *Political Liberalism*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1996; Nussbaum, Martha. *Liberty of Conscience: In Defense of America's Tradition of Religious Equality.* New York: Basic Books, 2008; Nussbaum, Martha. "The First Founder." *New Republic*, September 10 2008.

[2] Bejan, Teresa. "Evangelical Toleration." *The Journal of Politics*, volume 77, number 4 (2015); 1103.

toleration, there is another important religious dimension that has been largely neglected: the role of eschatological convictions in promoting liberty of conscience. The eschatological fervor of English protestants fueled political thinking and political action alike. As Teresa Bejan writes regarding the "Readmission" of Jews to England in 1655, "The apocalyptic expectations of English Protestants dictated that the time for the Jews' conversion was nigh and carefully circumscribed toleration a necessary means to that end."[3] Such apocalyptic fervor is evidenced throughout 17th century literature on religious toleration. English Baptist pastor and lay theologian Thomas Helwys, in the first English-language tract on religious liberty, identified the "compulsion of conscience" as undeniably related to the Antichrist and a future apocalyptic conflict, and later ministers in the same tradition would continue to rely on eschatological arguments to support an expansive conception of religious toleration.

Given the admittedly esoteric character of such topics, why ought contemporary theorists of toleration study the intricate theological details of early modern arguments? Simply put, liberal doctrines of toleration face significant contemporary challenges. The challenges of illiberal domination and oppression, threats to political stability, and the inability of modern moral language to condemn error have led many theorists to question the value of liberal toleration, or to even abandon it wholesale. In the face of such challenges, theorists may seek to bolster contemporary accounts of toleration through reexamining historical accounts of religious toleration.

Eschatological or apocalyptic political movements – movements with an eye towards the end of history – are commonly understood to pose an existential threat to political order. Many

[3] Bejan, "Evangelical Toleration"; 1103.

historians of political thought have suggested that eschatological political theories promote violent revolution, social upheaval, and the radical transformation of society.[4] Those who interpret political history in light of a future, perfected kingdom of God or irenic 'millennium' have often precipitated radical intolerance and political catastrophe. In the words of theologian Jürgen Moltmann, "no hope has caused so much unhappiness."[5] The distinctive eschatological beliefs of many early English Baptist congregations, however, lead to a principled and extensive commitment to the ideals of religious toleration, liberty of conscience, and the separation of church and state powers. The Baptist commitment to "eschatological millenarianism," or a political theology characterized by the virtues of patience, hope, and comity, offer compelling solutions to contemporary problems in religious toleration.

The structure of this work is as follows: In Chapter 2, I will sketch a few of the most salient challenges to contemporary liberal theories of toleration. Chapter 3 will present a brief discussion of millenarianism in the history of political thought. Chapter 4 will outline the development of religious toleration through the eschatological commitments of English Baptists from Thomas Helwys to Roger Williams and later theologians. Chapter 5 will comprise an application of the idea of 'eschatological millenarianism' to contemporary political theory. The concluding chapter will outline several challenging cases where contemporary theories of toleration may be insufficient, and outline the practical implications of this eschatological ethos of toleration.

[4] For instance, see Cohn, Norman. *The Pursuit of the Millennium: Revolutionary Messianism in Medieval and Reformation Europe and Its Bearing on Modern Totalitarian Movements.* New York: Academy Library, 1969.

[5] Moltmann, Jürgen. *The Coming of God: Christian Eschatology.* Fortress Press. 1996; 146.

Chapter 2: Contemporary Challenges to Toleration

Liberal accounts of religion typically rely on the 'privatization' of belief, clearly delineating between the sacred and the secular. In the words of historian John Coffey, "the New Testament primitivism of the sects made it possible to conceive of the church as a private, voluntary association."[6] However, critical theorists of religion such as Talal Asad have criticized this position and the dominant idea of a purely secular public space. Asad suggests that the "repeated explosions of intolerance in American history" are "entirely compatible (indeed intertwined) with secularism in a highly modern society."[7] On this reading, secularism often carries with it a militant bias against members of conservative, traditional, or illiberal religions. Perhaps nowhere are the secular sources of "explosions of intolerance" so clearly reflected as in France's "burkha bans," Switzerland's 2009 ban on the construction of new minarets on Islamic mosques, and other such harsh limitations on religious expression justified by appeal to ideals of secularity.

While such policies demonstrate hostility towards the public exercise of illiberal faith, they are often justified along liberal principles; in one such case, Dutch feminist Ayaan Hirsi Ali paradoxically supported the Swiss ban on minarets as "a vote for tolerance and inclusion."[8]

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[6] Coffey, John. "Puritanism and Liberty Revisited: The Case for Toleration in the English Revolution." *The Historical Journal*, volume 41, no. 4 (1998); 978.

[7] Asad, Talal. *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity.* Stanford University Press, 2003; 7.

[8] Ali, Ayaan Hirsi. "Swiss ban on minarets was a vote for tolerance and inclusion." *The Christian Science Monitor*, 5 December 2009.

Charles Taylor identifies a hostile tendency among certain theories of religion that conceive of secular regimes as "bulwarks against religion" rather than aiming to fairly balance and negotiate difference between all manner of religious and non-religious belief systems.[9] Aggressively secularized conceptions of the relationship between the state and religion such as the French ideal of *laïcité*, contribute to the exclusion of the devout from secular public spaces.

These are features of what may be termed the "exclusive" account of liberal toleration, one where illiberal religious groups may be excluded from the boundaries of the tolerable. These frontiers are often drawn along lines consistent with the modern, liberal, 'privatized' conception of religion, displaying a clear bias in favor of the Protestant religious tradition. As Jeff Spinner-Halev has said, "liberalism will tolerate non-Protestants, as long as they conceive of their religion as a matter of individual conscience and privatized practice."[10] Yet the exclusionary approach to toleration conjures a significant problem, what I term the *problem of necessity*. A society entirely composed of those who affirm basic liberal doctrines has little need for toleration. Instead, we require – and may demonstrate – the virtue of toleration when we encounter and live in peace with those whose beliefs, thoughts, actions, traditions, and cultures are repugnant to us on a deep and visceral level. As Bernard Williams puts it, "We need to tolerate other people and their ways of life only in situations that make it very difficult to do so."[11] The virtue of toleration is not seen when we welcome those who are fundamentally like us,

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[9] Taylor, Charles. "How to Define Secularism" in *Boundaries of Toleration*, eds. Alfred Stepan and Charles Taylor. New York: Columbia University Press, 2014; 74.

[10] Spinner-Halev, Jeff. "Hinduism, Christianity, and Liberal Religious Toleration." *Political Theory*, vol. 33, no, 1 (2005); 33.

[11] Williams, Bernard. "Tolerating the Intolerable" in *The Politics of Toleration in Modern Life*, ed. Susan Mendus. Durham: Duke University Press, 2000; 65-67.

but when we extend gestures of friendliness, neighborliness, friendship, and openness to those whom we struggle to understand or reason with, much less appreciate. Exclusive accounts of toleration fail to grasp the reality Michael Walzer has noted: "most of the groups that are tolerated … are in fact intolerant."[12] If we demand adherence to liberalism as a precondition for tolerating a group, we run the risk of only extending toleration to those with whom we share substantial normative agreement and so may fail to practice toleration in any meaningful sense.

In recent years, however, a more "inclusive" model has been offered as an alternative to the exclusionary model of toleration favored by many liberal theorists. This alternative approach redefines toleration in affective rather than institutional terms. Andrew Murphy distinguishes between two similar but distinct virtues, suggesting that "we use the term "toleration" to refer to *social or political practices*, and "tolerance" to refer to *attitudes*.[13] The former, Murphy surmises, is central to political liberalism while the latter is not. Richard Avramenko and Michael Promisel, however, document the shift in recent theories of toleration from historical "toleration" to "tolerance," writing "The familiar principles of ethical objection and the refusal to interfere—once invoked to assuage violent conflict and cruelty—no longer suffice. Toleration has become a positive demand for recognition and respect."[14]

Many attempts at crafting a more inclusive standard of toleration lapse into demands for positive acceptance, or what Murphy terms "tolerance." This requirement for the positive assessment and acceptance of views that we (by definition) find objectionable may threaten the

[12] Walzer, Michael. *On Toleration*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999; 80.

[13] Murphy, Andrew. "Tolerance, Toleration, and the Liberal Tradition." *Polity*, vol. 29, no. 3 (1997); 595.

[14] Avramenko, Richard, and Michael Promisel. "When Toleration Becomes a Vice: Naming Aristotle's Third Unnamed Virtue." *American Journal of Political Science*, vol. 62, no. 4 (2018); 850.

stability of toleration. While the concern with exclusive accounts of toleration is that they fail to encompass intolerant minorities who are rightfully the subject of toleration, inclusive accounts may rob a society of the moral language necessary to condemn those morally reprehensible views that are truly beyond the pale.[15]

I suggest that any adequate approach to toleration in today's ever-increasingly globalized and interconnected world must draw a position between what I have called the "exclusive" and "inclusive" models of toleration. It must be possible to tolerate many groups who hold positions inconsistent with liberal values—else we are hardly promoting toleration. Conversely, our account must also reserve adequate moral language and space to condemn certain truly unconscionable acts or beliefs. To repeat a common aphorism, liberal democracy is not a suicide pact. Lastly, out account must give us reason not only to begrudgingly tolerate those we disagree with, but to respectfully engage with them as co-citizens of a shared political community.

To this concern – the need for a stronger comprehensive account of toleration – is added one additional concern, or what John Rawls terms the "problem of stability." A regime of toleration ought not to be contingent on a distribution of power that may be subject to rapid or sudden change. If toleration is going to serve the long-term stability of a polity, it ought to be more than a *modus vivendi*—it must be principled.[16] If toleration is to survive—and history warns us how rare it is—we must offer compelling, principled reasons to tolerate practices, beliefs, and people we disagree with. Given the rare yet precious nature of toleration, almost any

[15] This is an issue taken up at greater length in Avramenko and Promisel, "When Toleration Becomes a Vice." They note, among other things, how some liberal theorists have gone so far as to demand respect for deeply concerning cultural and religious practices such as female genital mutilation.

[16] See Rawls, *Political Liberalism*.

system of toleration is worth pursuing. However, it is possible to craft a system that avoids many of the problems that plague less comprehensive or unbalanced accounts of toleration.

In summary, liberal toleration faces three particularly challenging obstacles. First, it must not be satisfied with a circumscribed account that excludes from toleration precisely those groups that require tolerance of us. Second, if liberalism is to be distinguished from libertinism, it must retain the moral language and standing necessary to sharply rebuke, condemn, and proscribe horrific abuses that simply *cannot* be tolerated.[17] Lastly, a successful account of toleration must be principled, compelling, and feasible. It must offer individuals and institutions compelling reasons to not only tolerate but peacefully live alongside those we dislike or disagree with. With these problems in mind, I turn now to outlining a line of argument in early modern theories of religious toleration that I believes offers a solution to these obstacles.

[17] See Okin, Susan Moller. "Is Multiculturalism Bad for Women?" *Boston Review*, October/November 1997.

Chapter 3: Political Millenarianism

Since the time of Christ, few concepts have so thoroughly seized the imagination of the deeply religious than the idea of the Millennium—an irenic, thousand-year kingdom where the church rules alongside God on earth. From the fall of Rome until the late medieval period, church teaching generally followed the writing of St. Augustine of Hippo, who interpreted the Bible's eschatological prophecies figuratively. In the 12th century, however, the apocalyptic interpretations of the Italian priest Joachim of Fiore provided an outline for the radical transformation of society in light of the impending end of the world. From the followers of Fra Dolcino of Navara to the Taborites to the Münster Anabaptists, fervor for establishing the millennial kingdom of Christ led many groups to adopt radical means of living and to strive for rapid political change. Norman Cohn, Eric Voegelin, and many others have suggested that millennial doctrines become ascendant during periods of existing social upheaval, and that millenarian politics form the seed of modern illiberal and totalitarian impulses.[18] By implication, millenarian politics pose a threat to liberal toleration and the pluralistic society. John Coffey goes so far as to blame millenarian eschatology for the backsliding of toleration in the late 17th century, writing "Tolerationist dichotomies were to be swallowed up by millennial holism."[19]

[18] See Norman Cohn's *In Search of the Millennium*, and Voegelin, Eric. *Science, Politics, and Gnosticism*. Regnery Publishing, 1968.

[19] Coffey, 978.

These accounts of the historical role of millenarian eschatology err in their failure to recognize important differences in theological formulations of the doctrine of the millennium. One common distinction has to do with the temporal placement of the millennium. Some Protestant theological traditions (including, generally speaking, the Scottish covenanters, Presbyterians, and Continental Reformed churches) anticipated Christ's triumphant Second Coming (or *Parousia*) at the culmination of the millennium, as the final crowning jewel of a temporal Christian kingdom established by the judicious rule of the saints on earth. Others—most notably within the early General and Particular Baptist[20] traditions in England—believed that the true church's experience would be characterized by alienation, oppression, and persecution on earth. Christ's return, at the nadir of the church's experience, would precede the establishment of the millennial kingdom through his power alone. These two approaches mirror the common—yet historically anachronistic—theoretic distinction between "pre-" and "post-" millennial eschatology. However, the precise timing of the millennium and *parousia* is largely irrelevant to the practice of politics. Rather, toleration is closely related to the question of what role the faithful are to play in the establishment of the Kingdom of God.

In the same article that Coffey vilifies millenarian politics, he notes that not all millenarian doctrines required violent revolution or the purification of society through ritualized violence, writing "[Thomas] Collier, for instance, rejected his earlier conviction that the saints would imitate the wars of Israel and usher in the millennium … He still believed in a future millennium in which the saints would rule, but this would only be inaugurated after the Second

[20] The fledgling Baptist movement in England was divided between "General" Baptists who affirmed man's exercise of free will in salvation, and "Particular" or Calvinistic Baptists, who taught predestination and God's sovereignty over salvation. Some accounts have suggested that Baptist toleration stems from "free will" or non-coercive soteriology, however the geneology of Baptist toleration I offer here demonstrates otherwise. Expansive doctrines of religious toleration were promoted by General and Particular Baptists alike throughout the 17th century, from Helwys' General Baptist congregation to the authors of the 1689 London Baptist Confession of Faith.

Coming of Christ. In the meantime the church must eschew violence and the magistrate must rule only over 'the Bodies and Estates of men'."[21] While the shift in Collier's thinking may have included a move from post- to pre- millennialism, the primary motivation for toleration lies in the conviction that the church is not tasked with establishing the kingdom of God on earth.

By transcending debates over pre- and post- millennialism, theorists are able to focus more clearly on the prescriptive aspects of political theology. In an insightful work on millenarian theology and politics, Jürgen Moltmann shares his concern with the destructive tendencies of a certain type of millenarian politics, writing that "no hope has caused so much unhappiness."[22] However, Moltmann recognizes that the disastrous millenarian politics that Cohn, Coffey, and others fear stem from one specific form of millenarianism that seeks radical social transformation—this is *historical millenarianism.* Moltmann suggests an alternative to this activist eschatology, what he terms "eschatological millennialism." Rather than seeking to establish the millennium on earth through radical change, in eschatological millennialism the expectation of a reign of saints is projected into the future as "a necessary picture of hope in resistance."[23] This healthy eschatological millenarianism serves as an image of what it means to display "hope in resistance, in suffering, and in the exiles of this world."[24] If taken as a blueprint for revolution, millenarian politics may lead to catastrophic outcomes, but "incorporated in eschatology" and taken as a hopeful portrayal of future peace "it gives strength to survive and to

[21] Coffey, 979.

[22] Moltmann, *The Coming of God*; 146

[23] Moltmann 1996, 192.

[24] Moltmann, 1996. 192.

resist."[25] While many contemporary Protestants followed the path of historical millenarianism towards violence, intolerance, and radical transformation of political life, many clergy and congregations in the fledgling English Baptist movement developed a patient, non-violent, hopeful political eschatology that exemplifies Moltmann's eschatological millenarianism. This alternative form of millenarianism directly influenced the development of doctrines of religious toleration through projecting a hopeful future that the faithful must patiently await, while pursuing comity with others in society.

[25] Moltmann, 1996. 192.

Chapter 4: Eschatological Toleration

The eschatological dimension of Baptist tolerance is evidenced even in its earliest formulations such as that of Thomas Helwys, one of the intellectual progenitors of modern Baptist theology and a leader of the historically important Gainesborough-Scrooby separatist congregation. Helwys helped engineer the congregation's move to Leiden, in Holland, and there authored one of the first Baptist confessions of faith.[26] While many in the congregation emigrated to the Americas, Helwys returned to England to found a General Baptist congregation. With him, Helwys brought the manuscript for his *A Short Declaration of The Mystery of Iniquity*, believed to be the earliest English-language tract on religious liberty, which begins with the suggestion that the apocalyptic prophecies of Scripture foretell the audience's contemporary history. Helwys quickly connects the religious intolerance of the Roman Catholic church with the apocalyptic regime of the Antichrist, writing "who does not know and see that this prophecy [regarding the "Man of Sin"[27]] is fulfilled in that Romish[28] mystery of iniquity."[29] The central feature of the Antichrist's reign is religious intolerance: "The man of sin will have a kingdom where there shall be mighty power and authority one over another's conscience, appointing and

[26] Rich, Antony D. "Thomas Helwys' First Confession of Faith 1610." *Baptist Quarterly*, vol. 43, no. 4 (2009).

[27] An eschatological figure mentioned in 2 Thessalonians 2, typically identified in Christian theology as the Antichrist.

[28] "Romish" meaning having to do with the Roman Catholic Church.

[29] Helwys, Thomas, and Richard Groves. *A Short Declaration of the Mystery of Iniquity*, *(1611/1612)*. Mercer University Press, 1998; 12

compelling men how they shall worship their God, and to imprison, to banish, and to cause to die them that resist."[30]

Helwys turns to formulating clearly delineated realms for spiritual and temporal power, writing that "an earthly sword is ordained of God only for an earthly power, and a spiritual sword for a spiritual power."[31] Accordingly, the "earthly sword" may only be used to punish offenses against the earthly power, while punishment for spiritual transgressions is beyond the authority of the state. Within the spiritual realm, or "the kingdom of Christ, which is heavenly and endures forever," faith is valued over compelled obedience and Christ extends lordship over his subjects."[32] On earth, however, "no sword of justice [is] at all required or permitted to smite any for refusing Christ."[33] Instead, the only reason the monarch possesses power is for "the well-governing and ruling of a king's state and kingdom, which is worldly and must fade away."[34] Helwys echoes this distinction in the inscription he wrote in the frontispiece of a copy delivered to King James I: "The King is a mortal man and not God, therefore [he] has no power over the immortal souls of his subjects."[35] "What greater evil can be committed against Christ?" asks Helwys, than to allow temporal powers to infringe upon his spiritual kingdom? This usurpation of Christ's right to rule his church is, according to Helwys, the fulfilment of apocalyptic prophecy; "therein lies the depth of the mystery of iniquity of the man of sin, in taking wholly

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[30] Helwys, *The Mystery of Iniquity*. 23.

[31] Helwys, *The Mystery of Iniquity*. 35.

[32] Helwys, *The Mystery of Iniquity.* 38-39.

[33] Helwys, *The Mystery of Iniquity*. 39.

[34] Helwys, *The Mystery of Iniquity*. 39.

[35] Helwys, *The Mystery of Iniquity*. Frontispiece, reproduced in facsimile.

from him [Christ] his power, and yet professing his name."[36] Those earthly monarchs who profess Christianity, yet usurp Christ's power by wielding temporal power to punish spiritual error reveal themselves to be Anti-Christian. As all spiritual matters belong to God, political power cannot be used to abridge *any* spiritual error; instead, toleration must be extended to all: "Let them be heretics, Turks[37], Jews, or whatsoever, it appertains not to the earthly power to punish them in the least measure."[38]

Though Helwys does not explicitly outline the nature of the millennium, his identification of the Roman Catholic Church and the Church of England as the first and second beasts of the apocalypse, respectively, firmly situates his vision of the church within a period of persecution or tribulation prior to Christ's Second Coming. Indeed, Helwys suggests that there is "a true pattern" wherein "the people of God are persecuted when the civil power does judge the cause of their faith and profession in their religion to God."[39] Rather than seizing power to reform the contrary minded, the example of Christ demonstrates that the faithful ought to "instruct with meekness, and by preaching the Word, seek their conversion, with all longsuffering, and not to destroy them by severe punishments."[40]

Even the Jewish people, who Helwys suggests are "the greatest enemies of Christ that are upon the earth" ought to be tolerated with patience and love.Thus the duty of the church is to

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[36] Helwys, *The Mystery of* Iniquity. 53.

[37] A term often used, at the time, to refer to Muslims.

[38] Helwys, 53.

[39] Helwys, 58.

[40] Helwys, 58.

exemplify an attitude of patience and longsuffering – a rule that "shall never be disannulled or made void while the heavens and the earth endure."[41]

This theme of eschatological patience is continued in the work of John Murton, Helwys' protégé and the direct inspiration for Roger Williams' *Bloudy Tenent of Persecution*. An elder in Helwys' congregation, Murton would later be imprisoned for his teachings on religious liberty. In *A Most Humble Supplication to the Kings Majesties*, printed 1621, Murton claims that "courses of afflicting our bodies for conscience case are not of Christ, but of Anti-christ."[42] Like Helwys, Murton suggests that political rulers who compel faith "sit in the consciences of men, where Christ should sit" and have committed a great treason. Thus they "uphold the Beast, and fight against the Lambe."[43] [44]The persecution of any person "only for cause of conscience" is contrary to both Christ's example and Scriptural testimony.[45]

Murton introduces a theme that would become common in later works, basing the doctrine of toleration in the parable of the wheat and tares[46] in Matthew 13. In this parable describing weeds that are indistinguishable from wheat in a cultivated field, Christ describes the faithful as wheat, while unbelievers grow up alongside them as tares. Murton instructs both church and government alike that they ought to "do as God directeth you in his Word, that

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[41] Helwys, 58-59.

[42] Murton, John. *A Most Humble Supplication to the Kings Majesties*. University of Michigan Library, 1621; 2.

[43] Murton, 34.

[44] That is to say, those who compel the consciences of others through force or use temporal force to punish spiritual error are siding with Antichrist, rather than Christ.

[45] Murton, 4.

[46] The word translated commonly as "tare" (or "weed" in some translations) refers to darnel ryegrass (*lolium temulentum*), a common weed that appears almost indistinguishable from wheat until fully mature.

cannot lie: *Let the wheat and tares grow together in the world, until the Harvest.*"[47] Exegeting this parable, Murton argues that "repentance must continually be waited for" and that "the worldly weapons of earthly Kingdoms cannot accomplish the things of Christ's Kingdom."[48] Even those who are without doubt unbelievers must be tolerated, as no one is beyond the possibility of reform or salvation; in turn, "the kings of Nations have no command at all to destroy the bodies of the contrary minded, they are forbidden to pluck up the tares."[49] Murton's use of this parable strengthens the claim begun by Helwys, that the church is tasked with displaying patience and longsuffering in the world, while earnestly seeking to spread the gospel through non-coercive evangelistic efforts. Condemnation or punishment for unbelief is not within the power of earthly institutions, but is wholly the responsibility of God and is to be deferred "until the end of this world."[50] Divine retribution for unbelief, if it does exist, is a matter for apocalyptic times and for God himself to accomplish.

The structure of these works treads a careful line between the pastoral and the political; both Helwys and Murton exhort the church to tolerant attitudes towards unbelievers, while also appealing to the governmental powers for greater religious liberties.[51] Helwys includes the claim that "difference in religion could never be proved sedition against the state,"[52] while Murton

[47] Murton, 4.

[48] Murton, 24.

[49] Murton, 34.

[50] Murton, 23.

[51] It is work noting, of course, that the 17th century elision between church and state blurs these categories of appeal. A letter concerning toleration directed to the King might appeal to the King of England's status as a Christian and the head of the Anglican Church, as well as his legal status as monarch.

[52] Helwys, 62.

devotes an entire chapter to arguing against the contention "that toleration will be hurtful, and dangerous to the state."[53] Moreover, each is clear that they do not request exemption from the normal laws of the state, instead stating "We only desire that God might have that which is his, which is the heart and soul in that worship which he requires."[54] Meanwhile, those who fail to pay due obedience to the civil authorities are to "bear their burden" and may be destroyed accordingly by the earthly powers.[55] In the *Humble Petition and Representation of Several Churches of God … Commonly (though falsely) Called Anabaptists*, a plea for toleration delivered to Parliament in 1649, Baptist minister William Kiffin worked to distinguish his own movement from that of the Levellers, Anabaptists, and other radical groups that combined religious toleration with efforts to abolish monarchical rule. Instead, the Baptists claimed "our meetings are not at all to intermeddle with the ordering or altering Civil Government (which we humbly and submissively leave unto the supreme Power,) but solely for the advancement of the Gospel."[56] Centuries before Moltmann's helpful distinction between historical and eschatological millenarianism, Baptist proponents of religious toleration strove to distinguish their peaceful and tolerant approach from the revolutionary movements that surrounded them.

Murton's treatise on religious toleration soon caught the eye of none other than Roger Williams, a Particular Baptist[57] minister who in 1630 fled religious oppression in England for the Puritan-governed Massachusetts Bay Colony. Five years later, finding that the Boston Puritans were no more tolerant than Laud's Anglicans, Williams would establish the colony of Rhode

[53] Murton, 30.

[54] Murton, 4.

[55] Murton, 4.

[56] Kiffin, William. "Humble Petition and Representation" University of Michigan Libraries, 1649.

Island and Providence Plantations, and enshrine absolute liberty of conscience within the colony's 1663 royal charter.[58] In *The Bloudy Tenent of Persecution*, Williams pledges his debt to John Murton while expanding further on the arguments offered by the earlier Baptists.

While Williams, more than his lesser-known counterparts, has been particularly subject to liberal reinterpretation, similar threads of eschatological salience are found throughout his work. W. Clark Gilpin suggests that Williams considered the church to exist in "the wilderness condition"—"a transitional state between the apostolic churches and their approaching restoration."[59] Williams ardently desired purity in the church (indeed, his oft-referenced "hedge of separation" between the church and state was intended to protect the church from the corrupting influence of the state, not *vice versa*), yet recognized that such purity could not be obtained until after Christ's return. The faithful Christian must be "willing to follow and be like him [Christ] in doing, in suffering;" however, this suffering is not without hope or end, as "Yet shalt thou see him, reign with him, eternally admire him, and enjoy him, when he shortly comes."[60] So Christian patience in the face of suffering is paired with a hope in Christ's return and subsequent triumph over evil. Yet in the interim—in the "wilderness"—the church only has recourse to the methods of "his *Martyrs* or *Witnesses*, standing before the *Lord,* and testifying his holy *Truth* during all the *Reign* of the *Beast*."[61] Williams exemplifies three traits central to the Baptist account of eschatological millenarianism that produced religious toleration: first, a hope

[58] "Charter of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations – July 15, 1663." Available online through the Avalon Project – Documents in Law, History and Diplomacy. Yale University.

[59] Gilpin, W. Clark. *The Millenarian Piety of Roger Williams*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979; 133..

[60] Williams, Roger. *Mr. Cotton's Letter Lately Printed, Examined, and Answered*, 1644 in *The Complete Writings of Roger Williams*. Russell and Russell, 1963..

[61] Williams, Roger. *The Bloudy Tenent Yet More Bloudy*, 1652. In *The Complete Writings of Roger Williams,* Russell and Russell, 1963.

in the future establishment of Christ's kingdom; second, a patience and longsuffering with regards to establishing that kingdom; third, a commitment to conscientious engagement with and solicitude towards unbelievers.

These themes are once again reiterated by the Cambridge-educated Particular Baptist pastor Christopher Blackwood, in a 1644 treatise entitled *The Storming of Antichrist in His Two Last and Strongest Garrisons: of Compulsion of Conscience and Infants Baptisme*. Once again, religious compulsion is again identified as inappropriate for normal times; "Compulsion is unlawful in Religion, from universal practice … till the time of Antichrist."[62] Moreover, "it is a note of the false church to persecute, and of the true Church to be persecuted."[63] The faithful should not expect to wield temporal power to bring others to Christ, but instead should expect to be persecuted: "Whosoever will live Godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution."[64] The parable of the wheat and tares is again taken to be normatively instructive, as "Christ forbids pulling up Tares, lest they pull up good Wheat."[65]

One of the clearest statements of the Baptist eschatology came in the *Humble Representation and Vindication* of 1654, in which an assembled body of Baptist pastors and theologians concluded that there was no ground to expect that they would enjoy earthly rule until after Christ's return in glory. To the contrary, they "expect as their portion, patiently to suffer the world as the Scriptures direct them."[66] The paired hope and patience of Baptist eschatology are

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[62] Blackwood, Christopher. *The Storming of Antichrist*. University of Michigan Libraries, 1644; 16

[63] Blackwood, 14.

[64] Blackwood, 14.

[65] Blackwood, 14.

[66] *Humble Representation and Vindication*, 1654. In *A Sourcebook for Baptist Heritage,* ed. H. Leon McBeth. Broadman Press, 1990.

clearly displayed here: the church earnestly hopes in a future age of peace and Christian eschatological fulfilment. Yet, they admit that there is no ground to expect that political power should be giving to the church to make the millennium imminent.

The distinctiveness of these views on civil government and toleration stand in sharp relief to other 17th century Protestant doctrines. Whereas the Westminster Confession of Faith and Savoy Declaration reserve for the civil magistrate the right to suppress blasphemy, heresy, and unbelief, the Baptist Confession of 1644 (revised 1646) sets forth the liberty of conscience as "the tenderest thing unto all conscientious men" and as a liberty "without which all other liberties will not be worth the naming, much less enjoying."[67] Other branches of Protestantism, affirming the historical millenarian tendency, sought to use the power of civil governance to protect the purity of Christian doctrine, institute an established church, and prevent the publication of blasphemous or heretical works – all in pursuit of creating the conditions necessary for the foundation of the millennial kingdom. The eschatological millenarianism of the Baptists, by contrast, firmly places eschatological fulfilment and the millennial kingdom in the future, and out of the hands of politicians and churchmen. Judgment and spiritual rule are solely the purview of the Messiah to come, and the millennial kingdom "shall be then fully perfected when He [Christ] shall the second time come in glory to reign among his saints."[68]

Within the eschatological framework affirmed by early English Baptists, political power was improperly used if it encroached on the domain of conscience. These Baptists fully expected to see political power abused by secular and religious authorities during their time. In light of

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[67] London Baptist Confession, 1644/1646. Note on Chapter XLVIII. Available online at http://reformed.org.

[68] London Baptist Confession, 1644/1646. Article XX.

this pessimistic expectation, they were convinced that their duty was to preach the Gospel ("To witness to the Beast" in the common parlance of the 17th century) rather than to coerce unbelievers to join their religion. The church is "patiently to suffer from the world" rather than seek to fundamentally transform it through radical political action. The exhortation to display patience and longsuffering, however, is not entirely unalloyed. It is married to an eschatological hope—that is, a confident belief that 'good' will win out in the end, that ill behavior may be punished, that the evil will not be allowed to ultimately triumph over the faithful, and that there will come an irenic society in accord with their deeply held beliefs. This hope enables the faithful to display patience through the suffering of the world.

Chapter 5: Eschatology in Political Theory

The category of eschatology within theology refers to doctrines concerning the end—both in the historical and teleological senses—of human existence. Adapting Moltmann's conception of eschatology as a formative ideal, I suggest that it may also be understood as a feature of most comprehensive political theories. Theories which contain images of the end of human life, the ideal society, or meditations on the *telos* of political life participate in eschatological thinking. In *Politics and Vision*, Sheldon Wolin suggests the "projective quality" of political philosophy, writing "The political philosopher, by an act of thought, strove to project a more perfect order into future time."[69] Much like an eschatological vision at the center of religious politics, "at the center of the enterprise of political theory was an imaginative element, an ordering vision of what the political system ought to be and what it might become."[70] According to Wolin, however, these visions of future utopia need not always be actualized; instead, the maintenance of idealistic and imaginative visions—even if logically or politically unfeasible—may serve as a guide in the development of more realistic forms of political order. In Wolin's summation, "Political knowledge of the best remained absolutely essential if men were to share even that slight participation in reality allowed by the gods."[71] Thus the utopia, a sort of secularized millennium, serves as an ordering ideal, an image of the perfect society

[69] Wolin, Sheldon. *Politics and Vision: Continuity and Innovation in Western Political Thought*. Princeton University Press, 2004; 33.

[70] Wolin, *Politics and Vision*. 33.

[71] Wolin, *Politics and Vision*. 34.

projected upon future time as a guide to human action. The political philosopher—and particularly the ideal theorist—in Wolin's account may be participating in eschatological thinking broadly construed.

It is in this broader sense of eschatology, one that admits of secularized or non-particularized visions of the end, that Alan Revering has identified a common thread of "eschatological hope" in Michael Walzer's political writings. Walzer, according to Revering, holds forth a "leading image of a participatory, self-determining community" that generates his own commitment to toleration: tolerance lessens persecution and preserves life, while also sustaining common life within the participatory community.[72] Tolerance is the mechanism by which vastly different individuals are empowered to live in communities that slowly begin to approximate the ideal community. In a not dissimilar fashion, John Rawls presents an eschatological vision that dictates the realization of political liberalism: "By showing how the social world may realize the features of a realistic utopia, political philosophy provides a long-term goal of political endeavor, and in working toward it gives meaning to what we can do today."[73] The "realistic utopia" Rawls describes may be, in practice, much like a conception of the millennial kingdom, thoroughly secularized and liberal. At any rate, eschatology in the broadest sense is not confined only to religious theories. Early Baptist eschatological arguments for religious toleration provide helpful correctives to both religious and secular modern theories of toleration.

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[72] Revering, Alan. "Eschatology in the Political Theory of Michael Walzer." *Journal of Religious Ethics*, no. 33 (2005); 103.

[73] Rawls, John. *The Law of Peoples*. Harvard University Press, 1999; 128.

Just as the idea of eschatology may be secularized—or at least, expanded to include secular theories—the lessons of Baptist eschatological millenarianism may be secularized and applied to contemporary theories of toleration. I have attempted to draw out three normatively important dimensions to the Baptist account of toleration: the virtues of patience, hope, and comity. The Baptist promoters of religious toleration did so patiently, determining to forgo radical revolutionary change. This patience moderated their hope in a future millennium to come – and in turn, their hope made their patience more bearable. Lastly, the Baptists eschewed separation from the world, instead engaging at length with other groups. These three traits form the backbone of a Baptist ethos of toleration. I will address each aspect of this ethos and their contemporary theoretical application in turn.

Patience

The most striking aspect of the Baptist political thinkers I have outlined is their patience. To gloss Roger Williams' message, the central duty of the church 'in the wilderness' is to patiently wait for the *Parousia* and the external establishment of the millennium. Rather than seizing political power to impose their spiritual will on unbelievers (as is typically the case with apocalyptic revolutionaries), these early Baptists believed that even those they considered diametrically opposed to their aims must be patiently tolerated until the end of the world. Patience, in itself, may be a close relative of the virtue of toleration. Further, a lack of eschatological patience is displayed by the chiliastic political theories that command the faithful to attempt to collapse the distant eschatological future into the present, bringing about the millennium through radical or violent means. Revering phrases this somewhat differently, concluding that "any eschatology that enters into political debate in a modern, pluralistic society

… must be informed by a profound sense of limitation."[74] Leninism, Nazism, and Münster Anabaptism all lacked this sense of limitation or eschatological patience, and political catastrophe resulted.

The disastrous consequences of eschatological impatience in politics may be obvious; however, it is difficult to explain why patience is a positive virtue. Provided we know what the ideal society is like, why ought we wait to institute it? In some secularized theories, resource may be had by appealing to the fundamental right of each individual to pursue a good life free of unnecessary coercion—and it takes quite a lot of coercion to create a millennium. However, within the doctrines of the Baptists, eschatological patience was closely tied to the idea of evangelism, and to the parable of the wheat and tares. Religious toleration formed a critical part of the ideal picture for present society, in the hope "that in these latter days" the civil authorities might "open a door of greater liberty to the Saints, for the spreading of the Gospel in the Nations of the World."[75] Tolerance is not a principle that militates against evangelical hopes, but the *sine qua non* of a society that allows the free exchange of ideas. It is worth noting, of course, that the virtue of patience is not unbounded. In as much as this describes an individual ethos (rather than an institutional scheme), there are situations where patience is neither required, nor ought to be encouraged. Profound moral ills cannot be patiently endured – but many lesser ills must be. The practice of patience is, ultimately, a strong presumption against coercion, against proscription, and against the exclusion of 'unbelievers' from our political community. It is, positively stated, a commitment to usher others into the millennium with us, rather than drag them into the perfect society after us.

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[74] Revering, 92.

[75] *Humble Representation and Vindication*, 1654.

Hope

The ideal of political or eschatological patience, if exercised alone, seems likely to cause despair, hopelessness, or disappointment. It may appear to be defeatist. However, patience for the early English Baptists was not practiced alone: it was accompanied by a firm and confident hope in the future. The idea of a millennial kingdom serves to embody lived history with a profound sense of meaning, offering hope to all those who live within it. In Moltmann's words, "Only millenarianism makes it possible to understand the kingdom of God not apocalyptically but teleologically." [76] Rather than viewing the end as an apocalyptic conflict or as entirely unknowable, peaceful, eschatological millenarianism allows us to reinterpret the kingdom of God (or our chosen secular utopic vision) as a moral and political idea. Eschatological millenarianism reshapes history from one conceived as a Manichean struggle without end between the forces of good and evil and resituates our historical experience in relation to a plan. "Only millenarianism makes of eschatology teleology," writes theologian Stanley Hauerwas.[77] "Christians believe in history," he continues; Christians "believe we come from a past that would find its fulfilment in the future." The temporal and teleological account of historical progress in light of the millennium allows the Christian (and the 17th century Baptist) to believe "that time has a narrative logic, which means that time is not just one damn thing after another."[78]

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[76] Moltmann, *The Coming of God*. 186.

[77] Moltmann, 186.

[78] Hauerwas, Stanley. *Approaching the End; Eschatology Reflections on Church, Politics, and Life*. Eerdmans, 2013; 84.

For the Baptist proponents of toleration, eschatological millenarianism contained a hope in the future. This hope carries with it many valences: it assures the believer that justice will be done in the end; it guarantees that evil will not ultimately triumph over good. It is not simply a balm on the soul grown wearing of patiently suffering (though it certainly is restorative) – it is the assurance that allows the Christian to leave the tares and wheat to grow together in the field until the harvest. Only one who is certain that the weeds will not choke out the true crop can display such patience. Eschatological hope provides the psychological and historical preconditions for the exercise of patience, offering both comfort to the weary and confidence that patience will not bear with it impermissible consequences. Eschatological hope is central to the success of a confident and expansive regime of toleration.

Eschatological hope may seem inaccessible to those who, unlike the early Baptists, do not believe in a divine author of history. However, at least some political thinkers have presented more-or-less secularized conceptions of eschatological hope. In a sentiment popularized by Martin Luther King Jr., the 18th century abolitionist Theodore Parker wrote "Look at the facts of the world. You see a continual and progressive triumph of the right. I do not pretend to understand the moral universe; the arc is a long one … from what I see I am sure it bends towards justice."[79] For the secular, eschatological hope might be divined from the progress of technology, society, or morality. This type of hope is demonstrated by the epistemic confidence of both John Locke and J.S. Mill. "Truth certainly would do well enough, if she were once left to shift for herself," writes Locke in *A Letter Concerning Toleration*. "She is not taught by Laws, nor has she any need of Force to procure her entrance into the minds of men."[80] This confidence

[79] Parker, Theodore. *Ten Sermons of Religion*. Crosby, Nichols, and Company, 1853; 84-85.

that truth will win out over falsehood underpins the Lockean account of toleration as well as Mill's argument for free speech in *On Liberty*. In this sense, secular eschatological hope may be reminiscent of 'Whig history', or the idea of an inexorable movement towards progress and enlightenment.[81]

The dangers of unalloyed eschatological hope of the religious sort have been revealed in the actions of those groups Moltmann classifies as "historical millenarian." Whipped into frenzy by their hope, yet unmoderated by patience, chiliastic groups displayed shocking intolerance and violence in pursuit of millenarian ends. However, the secular equivalent may be equally threatening. The same sense of moral and civilizational progress that underpinned Mill's confident approach to speech also permitted the oppression of less-advanced societies and people groups, and belief in the inevitability of Western expansion provided theoretical heft to the 19th century idea of Manifest Destiny. Whiggish history, just like the unrestrained hope of historical millenarian or apocalyptic cults, quickly becomes a vice.

This point illustrates the strength of the Baptist account of toleration I have outlined. Hope and patience, if separated or practiced unilaterally, fail to provide a basis for toleration that is extensive and confident, yet also cautious and restrained in action. Practiced together, patience and hope hold each other in tension, providing necessary counterpoints. Hope emboldens patience, while patience restrains hope.

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[80] Locke, John. *A Letter Concerning Toleration,* 1689. ed. James Tully. Hackett Classics, 1983; 46.

[81] See Nisbet, Robert. *A History of the Idea of Progress*. Transaction Publishers, 1994., and Spadafora, David. *The Idea of Progress in Eighteenth-Century Britain*. Yale University Press, 1990. The connection between 'Whig history' and teleology in religious toleration is made explicit in Spinner-Halev, Jeff. *Enduring Injustice*. Cambridge University Press, 2012; 48-49.

Comity

There is one final aspect of this Baptist eschatological vision – the ideal of comity or engagement. The practice of toleration among 17th century Christians was almost unavoidable intertwined with their evangelical intentions. It is a fact of history that unbelievers were tolerated in the hopes that many would come to believe in the Christian faith. The wheat and tares are left to grow in the field together until the harvest, but this parable was often framed in terms of preventing the alienation of unbelievers. "If those that come not till the last hour should be destroyed," writes John Murton, "then should they never come, but be prevented."[82] Patience is warranted at least partially in the hopes of conversion.

How can this sort of conclusion not lead to an invidious type of toleration, that only secures it instrumentally? Jean-Jacques Rousseau captures this concern in *The Social Contract*, suggesting "It is impossible to live in peace with those one believes to be damned."[83] Connecting toleration to the hope of conversion, the objection may be continued, undermines the equal status of all members of society, recreating one's fellow citizens as prizes to be won or converted rather than respected. This object is, at minimum, quite plausible.

On purely empirical grounds, however, there is some reason to doubt Rousseau's conclusion. Many of the Protestant proponents of toleration not only believed the other "to be damned" but often used damning language in their descriptions of them. However, as Michael Walzer has observed, this has not unilaterally led such theorists to hate those they deem to be

[82] Murton, *A Humble Supplication*. 24.

[83] Rousseau, Jean-Jacques. *The Social Contract*. Hackett Classics. Book IV, Chapter 8.

'damned', in fact, it appears that many in our world find it quite possible to live in peace with those who do not share their core commitments.

Ultimately, however, Rousseau's objection forgets the temporal quality of eschatological millenarianism. Heaven is not made on earth, and the Kingdom is not yet come. The Christian who embraces this eschatological reality does not believe his neighbor to be damned; the final state of souls is indeterminate. The parable of the wheat and tares, so compelling to the early Baptists, comes not only with the principle that the tares cannot be pulled up until the end of the harvest, but also the hope and acknowledgement that some of those who appear to be tares may be found to be wheat at the end of time.

The parable of the wheat and tares illustrates three principles that are central to the practice of toleration as I have outlined. First, the tares are left in the same field as the wheat. Likewise, those who must be the subject of toleration ought not to be excluded from public space or quarantined. Second, much is made of the epistemic limitations of our judgment. Just as it is difficult to distinguish darnel ryegrass from juvenile wheat, it is difficult to distinguish who is on the "right side of history" and who is not. This epistemic limitation serves as an enjoinder against the overzealous weeding of the world. Finally, some of those who appear to be tares may, in the end, be revealed as wheat. Together, these principles help constitute the ethos of engagement or comity that the Baptist proponents of toleration affirmed. Rather than excising unbelievers from the community, the believer ought to welcome them, engage them, and grow alongside them. This engagement is tempered and bolstered by the epistemic limitations of judgment, as well as the conviction that even those who appear to be weeds may be fruitful.

The Baptist commitment to comity and engagement with others is evidenced through the genealogy I have presented. While many of the other Protestants, fleeing conflict, emigrated

from Holland to settle in the new world, Thomas Helwys led a contingent back to England—and did so bearing a treatise defending his beliefs. Later, Roger Williams extended broad religious liberties to the inhabitants of Rhode Island, while writing books directed to his English critics. He took the ethos of engagement further than most of his contemporaries, living among the Narragansett tribe of Native Americans as a missionary and anthropologist. His *A Key into the Language of America* comprises a respectful and generally laudatory outline of their traditions, customs, culture, and language.

The ethos of engagement provides positive actions to take in light of our considered patience and hope. By exercising eschatological patience and tolerating intolerant or 'unbelieving' groups (at least provisionally), we secure a unique opportunity for what Teresa Bejan calls "evangelical relations." While I shy from the fraught terminology of evangelism, toleration provides opportunities for engagement with those we disagree with. This engagement may be instructive: in Michael Walzer's words, "They [the intolerant] may learn tolerance; more likely, they will learn to act as if they possessed this virtue." [84] Should we fail to exercise patience and thus exclude the intolerant from society, seclude them within homogenous enclaves, or destroy them altogether, we lose the opportunity to convince them of the merits of toleration. The exercise of eschatological patience defines temporal space within which to practice comity towards others. Bejan, discussing Roger William's commitment to toleration, offers one final response to Rousseau's concern:

> He [Williams] was under no illusion that constant contact with those we believe to be culpably in error on the fundamentals would bring us to respect them more. Nevertheless, he thought that constant evangelical engagement with the damned could perhaps keep us

[84] Walzer, *On Toleration*. 81.

> from *demonizing* them in the way that cloaking oneself in the righteous certainty of the like-minded will.[85]

Toleration, so conceived, requires not only the patient and hopeful toleration of 'unbelievers,' but a type of deep and regular engagement that humanizes them as members of our shared political space. Toleration does not preclude peaceful attempts to convert or convince those we disagree with. Instead, we demonstrate comity when we engage with the ideas and arguments of others.

[85] Bejan, 2015. "Evangelical Toleration." 1113.

Chapter 6: Puzzling Through Toleration

If the tolerant society is characterized by the free exchange of ideas, and even deeply illiberal or intolerant views are permitted within society, what guarantee is there that the tolerant or liberal will remain safe? Many contemporary theorists of toleration elucidate the concern that intolerant groups will come to dominate the tolerant. Karl Popper characterizes this as the "Paradox of tolerance," writing "Unlimited tolerance must lead to the disappearance of tolerance. If we extend unlimited tolerance even to those who are intolerant, if we are not prepared to defend a tolerant society against the onslaught of the intolerant, then the tolerant will be destroyed, and tolerance with them. "[86] John Rawls suggests a similar problem, concluding that the majority may abridge the freedoms of intolerant sects "when the tolerant sincerely and with reason believe that their own security and that of the institutions of liberty are in danger."[87] The paradox of tolerance suggests an impasse between the exercise of toleration and the long-term stability of a political order. To borrow language from an earlier section of this paper, it seems that there is an incommensurable conflict between the exclusive and inclusive models of toleration. If we fail to exemplify eschatological patience and establish comity with the intolerant, we have failed to display true toleration. However, if we do establish comity, we run the risk that they will be more successful in promoting their ideas, and our patience will prevent

[86] Popper, Karl. *The Open Society and Its Enemies, Vol. 1, The Spell of Plato*. Routledge, 1945. Note 4 to Chapter 7.

[87] Rawls, John. *A Theory of Justice* (2nd ed.) Belknap, 1975; 220.

us from responding adequately to preserve our security. The answer to this problem lies in eschatological hope, or the confidence that justice will be done though the skies fall.

The "paradox of tolerance" cannot be dismissed glibly. However, the eschatological toleration proposed by the early English Baptists outlines an ethos of toleration that may help us navigate truly fraught cases. In this last section, I intend to briefly sketch several difficult cases, and then outline how this eschatological ethos of toleration guides responses to these cases.[88]

The Intolerable Practice

Many traditional communities in Africa, Southeast and Central Asia, and the Middle East persist in the practice of female genital mutilation (FGM). This practice tends to be socially supported (in communities where it persists), and upheld by mature women within the community.[89] The practice is often interpreted by its practitioners to be religiously obligatory, or at least of high importance to cultural practice. To most Western interlocutors, the practice is both horrifying and unconscionable—and a clear example of harm perpetuated against women. Let us say that within our tolerant society, a group of central African immigrants seek to follow their traditional religious practices, which include imposition of FGM. How might the Baptist ethos of toleration assist us in navigating this case?

In this case, the principle most clearly in conflict is patience. How can we display patience towards those who forcibly and painfully perform unnecessary (and deeply harmful) surgeries on children? The answer is straightforward: the practice of FGM (at least, when

[88] I have intentionally selected two cases which belong to the category I consider more difficult to adjudicate: cases involving internal restrictions placed on a religious group's members, rather than demands for positive support or accommodation. It is a lower bar to deny official sanction than to forcibly intervene in a group's internal practices.

[89] Mackie, Gerry. "Ending Footbinding and Infibulation: A Convention Account." *American Sociological Review* (1996)*;* 999-1017.

performed on children) is beyond the pale of what patience requires of us. Simply put, the commitment not to make heaven on earth does not require us to allow others to make earth more hellish. Alternately, to consider the parable of the wheat and tares, not all weeds bear such striking resemblance to wheat! The practice of infibulation ought to be excluded from toleration—that is, in a liberal society it must move from the realm of social skepticism to legal proscription.

However, the ideal of patience is not silent here. While FGM performed on children is proscribed, patience dictates that so long as consenting adults may have elective cosmetic surgery on their faces, breasts, or bellies, consenting adults may have elective cosmetic surgery on their genitals. Exercising patience requires that even when a specific practice is found to be intolerable, legal solutions must be narrowly tailored to proscribe precisely what is intolerable and nothing more. From there, hope and comity take over as the most salient virtues of toleration. In hope of a brighter future where such practices no longer exist in any form, the tolerant liberal may pursue non-coercive means of persuasion aimed at changing beliefs and practices which may be morally repugnant yet not intolerable. Gerry Mackie exemplifies just this approach, discussing an agenda of changing social norms through education in order to shape the decision-making context that has heretofore preserved the practice of FGM in certain communities. Through practicing comity and respecting individuals—though not their practices or beliefs—in ways that humanize them, we may seek to overcome those practices we tolerate yet find viscerally repulsive, recognizing and responding to the human concerns and interests behind their practices or beliefs. The sheer quantity of varying liberal opinions on FGM indicate that liberal toleration alone has not been able to resoundingly offer a solution to this problem.

The Persuasive Inegalitarians

Let us imagine another case, which may seem familiar to Westerners. Within our tolerant society, a religious group espouses illiberal ideas regarding gender norms and the role of women in society. Specifically, this group suggests that many careers are inappropriate for females, and suggest normatively that women ought to be primarily concerned with childrearing. Further, women are excluded from leadership positions within the religious organization, and are often subject to certain requirements regarding modest dress, including the wearing of a veil or head-covering in public.[90] These particularities of belief and practice run counter to liberal ideas about equality and openness.

The religious group seeks to spread their ideas, publishing books, preaching sermons, and having conversations with other members of the society at large. Unfortunately for the tolerant liberal society, the representatives of this group happen to be charming, personable, well-versed in their doctrines, and extremely persuasive – no doubt due to their religion's focus on proselytism. The group grows quickly, and new converts are quick to adopt both the beliefs and practices that Western egalitarian liberalism frowns upon.

Within the Rawlsian or Popperian schema, this group may be a candidate for ostracism or exclusion: the tolerant "sincerely and with reason" fear that they will soon find their society fundamentally transformed into something decidedly less liberal. If this criterion is correct, the liberal majority may enlist the apparatus of the state to intervene, prohibiting this group from proselytizing or publicly airing their doctrines.

[90] This hypothetical, much as with the last one, primarily deals with practices rather than beliefs alone. This is not because toleration is concerned with practices alone, but because *liberalism* tends to draw clearer boundaries around practices rather than beliefs. If the aim is to bolster liberal accounts, then we will find ourselves dealing with interventions into practice.

This answer, as I take it, is unacceptable. While the 'tolerant' may be sincere and reasonable, there is something deeply concerning about introducing coercive government power into this situation, as outlined. At the moment of intervention, the 'intolerant' group has not coerced anyone to their beliefs, they have not relied on state support for their expansion, and they have made no threats. They are merely participating in the marketplace of ideas, and their product is selling well. Combatting the 'persuasive inegalitarian' with violence introduces a concerning and objectionable asymmetry. Coercive state power ought to be reserved for interfering in cases of actual harm or coercion: the alternative is hardly tolerance.

Should we wish to place this hypothetical on firmer grounds, we might identify the case as that of some Muslim populations in Europe or North America.[91] How can a hopeful, patient, and engaging schema of tolerance respond to this manner of challenge?

Whereas patience was the focus of our first hypothetical case, hope plays a greater role here. Liberal egalitarians must embrace a more confident view of their own theories, and in turn seek to place their views alongside those of the intolerant within the marketplace of ideas. Popper's theory is deeply pessimistic—no doubt due to the political catastrophe that marked his time—yet by and large, in the long run, there is reason to be hopeful for liberal democratic ideals.

It is in cases such as this that the eschatological ethos of toleration provides the strongest basis for toleration. Patience dictates moderate, narrowly tailored responses aimed only at excluding what is truly intolerable, while hope encourages a confident program of persuasion

[91] Other religious groups, including the Old Order Amish, the Roman Catholic Church, or conservative evangelicals might fall under the same aegis.

and solicitude. Together, these produce a relationship characterized by comity, where traditional conservative and egalitarian alike share in the respectful exchange of ideas and arguments.[92]

In the case of the conservative Muslim in Europe, this ideal of toleration will not permit limitations on the wearing of headscarves or other public symbols of faith, nor will it countenance a ban on the construction of minarets. Such proposals fail to exemplify patience, hope, or comity. Instead, this is a clear case for tolerance modeled on the parable of the wheat and tares. So long as the 'intolerant' are content to abide by the general laws of society and coexist within it, they must be left to grow in the field until the harvest.

Concluding Thoughts

These examples are non-exhaustive, yet serve to illustrate in brief how the ethos of tolerance derives from the early English Baptists may address two types of problems: one where an inclusive account of toleration fails to provide adequate answers, and one where an exclusive account of toleration suggests a troubling solution.

Early modern accounts of religious toleration are closely intertwined with the millenarian political theology made prominent by early English Baptists. Modern liberal toleration, however, by neglecting these theological arguments and instead focusing almost exclusively on the privatizing of belief, has retained serious inadequacies. Among other issues, contemporary accounts of liberal toleration tend either towards over-exclusion or over-inclusion, failing to reach a moderate ground that provides both expansive toleration and long-term stability. In the interest of giving credit where credit is due, there are many competing accounts of toleration that

[92] Respect, as I use it here, stands only for the respect due to others as moral agents and human beings, rather than connoting a respect for their conclusions or ideas.

have contributed to the growth of toleration, trust, and peaceful engagement. The traits of patience, hope, and comity are not entirely unique: hope is a feature of whiggish toleration, patience is a feature of systems such as the Ottoman millet system, and comity is championed by those respect based accounts such as those outlined by T.M. Scanlon and Rainier Forst. The account of toleration found in the practice and preaching of the early English Baptists I have described is unique for two reasons. First, it is historically unique: it would be centuries before similarly expansive accounts were offered or widely accepted. Second, this account is unique in that it contains and promotes all three virtues—patience, hope, and comity—together. By packaging these three aspects of toleration together in one principled package, the early English Baptist account of toleration is able to withstand many of the challenges that face other simplified or single-faceted approaches to toleration.

In returning to long-neglected English-language works on toleration, political theorists may recover critical arguments for religious toleration that may serve to bolster or strengthen modern conceptions of what it means to be truly tolerant. One such piece is found in the common use of eschatological language and symbolism in early arguments for toleration. In particular, English Baptist theologians and clergy through the 17th century from Thomas Helwys to William Kiffin present a compelling case for an expansive yet confident ethos of religious toleration based in their eschatological millenarian theology. Distinct from apocalyptic or chiliastic movements, this form of millenarianism is characterized by patience, hope, and comity. Transposed into the language of contemporary political theory, these ideas provide a helpful standard for evaluating contemporary responses to challenging cases—though primarily as an ethos for response rather than through institutional solutions. In order to face the challenges of an increasingly globalized world, a successful liberal account of religious toleration will display

eschatological patience about its imposition of the ideal society, a confident hope in the 'moral arc' of history or the battle for truth, and an earnest desire to respectfully engage with those who dissent from liberal values. With these three traits, borrowed from the apocalyptic literature on early modern toleration, liberal toleration will be better equipped to weather the storms of the future.

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